

Construction Commences on New Rich Valley Fair and Community Center Facility (May 31, 2006)

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Rich Valley Fair Building Groundbreaking Ceremony

Rich Valley, Virginia

May 31, 2006

I am pleased to visit Smyth County today to break ground on this new facility which will house the Rich Valley Fair and serve as a community center for the Rich Valley area.

The Rich Valley Fair is one of the oldest fairs of its kind in Virginia. It began in 1926 as a project of the Future Farmers of Virginia and, later, the Future Farmers of America. For 20 years, the Rich Valley High School FFA sponsored the fair, which included a horse show and agriculture and home-economics exhibits.

As the fair attracted more and more visitors each year, citizens in the Rich Valley community created the Rich Valley Agricultural and Fair Association, a non-profit organization, to manage the fair. Today, the fair is a nine day event, which includes a country music concert, Youth Day and a competitive beauty pageant in addition to the original features, the horse show and agriculture and home-economic exhibits. The fair can draw as many as 6000 visitors in a single night to the Rich Valley Fairgrounds, where we gather today.

In 2001, members of the Rich Valley Fair Association approached me to ask for assistance to obtain federal funds to construct a building on the Rich Valley Fairgrounds which would house the fair exhibits as well as events year-round in the Rich Valley community. Previously, the Fair Association used the former Rich Valley High School for the fair's exhibits and other community activities; however, the school was demolished in 1999 due to safety concerns.

The total cost for the initial construction of this facility is \$180,000, which has been provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through an appropriation approved by the U.S. Congress in 2003 at my request. This amount includes the purchase of a pre-fabricated, post-frame metal structure and the cost of the site preparation work, the foundation and building installation, and a portion of the plumbing and electrical work.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Rural Development Agency is providing a federal grant in the amount of \$70,000 and a low-interest federal loan in the amount of \$23,331 to the Association to equip the facility with tables, chairs, a portable stage, kitchen equipment, and a trophy case.

On July 28, the 72nd Annual Rich Valley Fair will take place, and the Fair Association plans to have the initial construction of the facility completed and the new, 9000 square foot building available to house the fair's exhibits and events at that time. The new facility will not only house the fair's events and exhibits, but it will also serve as a community center benefitting the residents of the communities near Rich Valley and Saltville including the Nebo, Chatham Hill and Ceres communities. Throughout the year, community organizations will hold events such as yard sales, reunions, receptions, and other indoor events in the facility.

Once initial construction of the facility is completed in July, the Fair Association will begin undertaking additional phases of the project, which will enhance and improve the original structure. Currently, the Association plans to complete additional electrical work, install a heating and cooling system, divide some of the space into meeting room or classroom space, create a kitchen area, and add a wastewater system. These future projects will cost an additional \$300,000. The Fair Association currently has plans to raise these funds through fair proceeds, local support, and private donations.

The groundbreaking we celebrate today is the result of a strong community effort to plan, design, and build the facility. A number of Rich Valley residents have lent time, ideas, and building materials to ensure that this project is successfully completed. The Rich Valley Fair Building will become the true center of the Rich Valley Community, bringing residents together to share in the experience of Rich Valley's community events.

I would like to take the opportunity of these remarks to recognize a number of individuals who have been instrumental in the success we celebrate today.

First, I would like to commend Tom Hess, President of the Rich Valley Agricultural and Fair Association, and the other members of the Association's Board for their persistent efforts to bring this project to fruition. I also want to thank the Rich Valley Farmer's Club for their important role in today's success.

I would also like to recognize Charlie Clark, Chairman of the Smyth County Board of Supervisors, and the other members of the Board for their efforts on behalf of this project. Ed Whitmore, Smyth County Administrator, and Mike Carter, Assistant County Administrator, also deserve our recognition today.

I also want to thank the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency Area Director, Travis Jackson, and the Rural Development Agency's excellent staff for their efforts in support of today's success.

The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission and its staff also deserve our thanks today as well as the H.S. Williams Company, who is completing the building construction, and Cameron Wolfe, who designed the building.

Also deserving our recognition today are Mark Burkett, who has been leading the efforts to complete this building, and T.W. Burkett, Roy Baldwin, Jim Buchanan, and Charlie Atkins, all of whom have contributed significantly to this project's success.

Finally, I would like to thank my retired District Director, Linda DiYorio, who has worked tirelessly, even after her retirement, to break ground on this project.

Today's success is an example of what can be achieved when citizens and government officials at the local and federal levels work together in aid of a common purpose. For that cooperation and successful work in providing a facility to house the Rich Valley Fair and a community center for Rich Valley, I commend all here and offer a special congratulations to the residents who will benefit from this center.